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History book club looking at Clark's poetry

PIERRE, S.D. -- His words rang true.

That was said of Badger Clark's poems about the West.

Clark's first book of poetry, *Sun and Saddle Leather*, is the History and Heritage Book Club's November selection.

"Clark was South Dakota's first poet laureate. We wanted people to learn more about this man whose life influenced many," said Patricia Miller, president of the South Dakota Heritage Fund.

The Heritage Fund is the nonprofit fundraising partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society. The Heritage Fund and the SDSHS Press co-sponsor the History and Heritage Book Club.

The guest speaker will be Paul Jensen of Wasta, a member of the Badger Clark Memorial Society. Gary Heintz of Pierre will perform some of Clark's poems that have been set to music. The meeting will begin at 7 p.m. CST on Tuesday, Nov. 8, in the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The meeting is free and everyone is welcome to attend.

Clark was born on Jan. 1, 1883, in Albia, Iowa. He moved with his family to Dakota Territory that same year. In 1898, the family moved to Deadwood. After graduating from Deadwood High School, Clark attended Dakota Wesleyan University in Mitchell for one year, worked on a pineapple plantation in Cuba and then lived the life of a cowboy in Arizona in before returning to the Black Hills in 1910. *Sun and Saddle Leather* was published in 1915.

Gov. Leslie Jensen conferred the title of South Dakota Poet Laureate on Clark in 1937, a title Clark retained until his death on Sept. 27, 1957.

Jensen's father was a friend of Clark's. He learned Clark's poetry while traveling back and forth across South Dakota.

"Clark is still considered to be the cowboy poet that all other cowboy poets aspire to," Jensen said. "Though his best works are throughout his three books of poetry, I consider *Sun and Saddle Leather* to have the most of his best."

Sun and Saddle Leather contains two of Clark's most popular poems: "A Cowboy's Prayer" and "A Border Affair," set to music as "Spanish is the Lovin' Tongue."

The Badger Clark Memorial Society was created in 1984 to preserve and distribute Clark's works and to keep and preserve the Badger Hole, Clark's home in Custer State Park. Jensen has been a member of the Badger Clark Memorial Society for about 25 years and has served as its vice president for much of that time.

Sun and Saddle Leather is available at the Heritage Stores at the Cultural Heritage Center and the Capitol. History and Heritage Book Club members receive a 10-percent discount and SDSHS members receive an additional 10-percent discount when they purchase the book at either Heritage Store. Clark's other volumes of poetry are also available in the Heritage Stores.

For more information about the book club, please contact the South Dakota Heritage Fund at (605) 773-6006.

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The South Dakota Heritage Fund is a private charitable nonprofit that seeks funding to assist the South Dakota State Historical Society in programming and projects to preserve South Dakota's history and heritage for future generations.

The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council, and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society's world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit www.history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.